

296 FAMILY AND COMMUNITY IN IRELAND

444 subsists only because she is a part of the local community. Though she charges a bit more, she spares one the longer walk to the village center.

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571] Country shops are often larger than hers. Sometimes where the distance to the village center is greater, they sell nearly everything one could get in town, outside the specialized drapers' or hardware, boot, and shoe shops. They sell all the farm staples, such as groceries, sugar, flour, tea, and tobacco. Here people may come from two or three miles around. The farmers all know they pay more, but the shop is a convenience. It may get the only newspaper in the district, and men drop in to hear the news. In the evenings a local school of cards may flourish here and the boys foregather.

The country shop reaches its zenith at the crossroad, where a church, a parochial house, a school, and a creamery may stand as well. Here the shop often dates from the days just after the famine and has had a long history of prosperity. In the past generation many such crossroads produced county councillors, and the rewards of public service often meant the acquisition of several rich farms in addition to the shop. The shop serves the surrounding countryside and collects its produce, and it derives its reward from the service it performs.

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571 The position of the country shopkeeper is to be found in his place within the system of relations which make up the community of small farmers behind his shop. His function as economic agent of distribution is only part of his role. He is in a situation which must be described as a perpetual seesaw. If he is drawn too far within the local community, he loses contact with the outside world. If he is drawn too far outward, he loses touch with his customers. He must maintain a balance in a delicate equilibrium.

He is caught within a pattern of mutual obligations to the farmers on the one hand and the social system of the

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town classes on the other. Let it suffice to show his place that in a recitation of such a shopkeeper's intimates and associates it is most often not the farmers but the members of the community who are in a similar position who figure. His associates are the parish priest, the schoolmaster, the local police, and the local "rancher." When marriages are made for his daughters, they are made with big farmers, and husbands are got at considerably greater distances than in the case of the small farmers. Along with his associates, he makes up the rural middle class, at once a halfway point and a channel of movement for the infiltration of gradual change, poised between the small farmers of the countryside and the middle and upper classes of the urban centers. 441
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Other agencies of exchange and contact between rural communities and the outside world are as much overlaid with social sentiment and custom expressive of valuations upon local status as is the position of the crossroad shopkeeper. The form of exchange is ceremonial, and a ritual exists to express much more than the mere mechanism of contact and exchange.

The two chief occasions of economic exchange outside the shops at the crossroad or in the towns are the best examples of such ceremonial. Let us take the fairs first. The fairs are still the most important mechanism of exchange between the small farm producers and the middlemen who start farm produce upon its journey to the ultimate consumer. Nothing has risen to threaten them seriously even in this day of economic complexity. The farmers of the rural hinterland of towns and villages journey with cattle, pigs, corn, and wool to market, to sell them that day or else to carry them home again. Some big farmers sell from the land direct to dealers and jobbers. A few small farmers sell direct to neighbors. These are exceptions, and sales in market and fair are well-nigh universal. 443

The fairs are not only universal, they are also elaborately

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443 the famous cattle droves.¹ The town lies ^{on} one of the sinuous
 527 gravel ridges (eskers) which lead eastwards from the limestone
 543 grazing grounds of east Galway to the crossing of the Shannon
 [361] and then thread their way through a maze of bogs to reach the
 headwaters of the Irish Sea rivers. The eskers provide dry
 [487] footing for roads some of which are routeways of great anti-
 quity, and down to the coming of railways they served as drove
 roads along which cattle and sheep were taken to the fattening
 pastures and markets of the eastern lowlands. The date of the
 great fair of Ballinasloe, in early October, corresponds with
 that of the largest trysts at Crieff and Falkirk, and would have
 allowed time for the movement of livestock to eastern Ireland
 or to the English fairs by All-Hallows or Martinmas.

489 No study of the Irish drove roads has been made as for those
 of Scotland and Wales, but it seems probable that the movement
 439 of livestock along routes from west to east has been developing
 since the Middle Ages, when its logical outcome was the export
 trade in hides from the Irish Sea ports. In the seventeenth
 and eighteenth centuries exports largely took the form of salt
 beef and butter, but since the early nineteenth century the store
 cattle trade has been so dominant that it has latterly accounted
 for half the total export trade of southern Ireland. It involves a
 movement of cattle not only from west to east but from small
 farms to large, and from scanty grazings to the lush fattening
 pastures of Meath or the English lowlands. Apart from small
 strings of beasts on their way to local fairs, the cattle droves
 are today most in evidence in the crowded dockside streets of
 the ports where they are herded on to the cross-channel boats,
 but until quite recently donkeys and goats purchased at fairs in
 the west still travelled to the ports on the hoof. The drover-
 dealers who accompanied them were colourful characters whose
 experience stood them in good stead in the wider world. These
 441 dealers in the unwanted residues of the countryside—in rags
 439 and scrap as well as asses and goats—have often set up as rag-
 and-scrap merchants in the large towns along their routes from
 Belfast and Dublin to the English fairs, and one of them became
 Lord Mayor of a Scottish city. Others made big money as
 pedlars of cloth in America or Australia. Most of these 'pahvees',

¹A. R. B. Haldane, *The Drove Roads of Scotland*.

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as they are called, were born in the mountain country of Slieve Gullion in Co. Armagh, adjoining the rich plains of the Pale where their ancestors sharpened their wits on the English settlers. Many stories are told of the tricks by which 'the goatmen' disposed of their animals before they reached their goal at Barnet Fair, of billy-goats sold to the innocent English as good milkers or as an infallible means of keeping a garden free of weeds. 'Every guy who comes here selling cloth', said a Canadian rancher, 'tells me he is from Slieve Gullion. It must be some city.'

Although the export of live cattle from Ireland was prohibited, in the interests of British farming, through most of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the short sea-crossings from north-east Ireland enabled dealers to ship them to southern Scotland. The embargo was lifted in 1765, and by the early nineteenth century many thousands of cattle were reaching Portpatrick and being driven to the fairs at Dumfries and Carlisle, and farther afield to Barnet in Hertfordshire and St. Faith's near Norwich. Many Irish harvesters and other summer migrants followed the trails trodden by Irish cattle and their drovers, but after 1830, with the coming of the steamship, Glasgow, the Mersey and Holyhead became, as they remain, the chief points of entry for both animals and men.

Before the agrarian revolution and the import of feeding stuffs made it possible to keep stock through the winter, the months of October and November were critical for the farmer, who had to dispose of many of his animals at this time. The trade is now better distributed through the year, but although monthly fairs have become general since the famine, the sales vary a good deal from month to month, and the important fairs still fall at the turning points of the pastoral year, particularly in May and November. The spring fairs of February and March and the Lamma's fairs of July and August were to a large extent concerned respectively with horses and with sheep and wool, but those of May and November were the great cattle fairs and also the hiring fairs. We are reminded that the Celtic year in pre-Christian times had only two seasons, winter and summer, and that the first days of November and May are still the Irish gale-days, the times when rents fall due.